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Eijanaika (So what), Imamura, Shohei, 1981
Nusumareta yokujo (Stolen desire), Imamura, Shohei, 1958
Buta to gunkan (Pigs and battleships), Imamura, Shohei, 1961
Akai satsui (Intentions of murder), Imamura, Shohei, 1964
Zegen (The pimp), Imamura, Shohei, 1987
Nishi Ginza Ekimae (Nishi Ginza Station), Imamura, Shohei, 1958
Kuroi ame (Black rain), Imamura, Shohei, 1989
Narayama bushi-ko (The ballad of Narayama), Imamura, Shohei, 1982
Nianchan (My second brother), Imamura, Shohei, 1959

VANISHING POINTS: THE FILMS OF SHOHEI IMAMURA

DECEMBER 1 – DECEMBER 14

"I am interested in the relationship of the lower part of the human body and the lower part of the social structure on which the reality of daily Japanese life supports itself."
– Shohei Imamura

Shohei Imamura is widely recognized today as one of the most important directors to emerge from the Japanese New Wave of the 1960s, together with Oshima, Suzuki, and Shinoda. While Imamura's work quickly gained recognition on the international festival circuit, box office success overseas proved elusive, with Western audiences seeming to prefer the exquisite melodrama of Ozu and Mizoguchi, the action of Kurosawa or, eventually, the modernist art films of Oshima.

Imamura's work is typically ribald, bawdy, and earthy, revealing and reveling in the underpinnings of Japanese society: not the code of the samurai or the rigor of the tea ceremony, but something more primal and fecund. Imamura discovers this primal element in the coarser side of life – not the working class so much as the sub-proletariat (similarly beloved by Pasolini) made up of criminals, pimps, and pornographers – and especially in his indomitable, and decidedly unelegant, heroines. This search for the primal gives Imamura's films both an anthropological aspect and an implicit critique of modernity and consumer capitalism. While Imamura's 1960s films are now acknowledged as bracingly idiosyncratic masterpieces, many of them bewildered critics and alienated audiences at the time, rendering Imamura's career especially vulnerable to the recession that struck the Japanese film industry in the 1970s. No longer able to make features, he founded a film school and made television documentaries before his triumphant comeback to the big screen with *Vengeance Is Mine*. In the last decades of his life, Imamura made films irregularly, but each film was regarded as an event.

This retrospective, which includes almost all of Imamura's theatrical features, was organized by Adam Sekuler, Northwest Film Forum, and Tom Vick, Freer and Sackler Galleries, Smithsonian Institution. Special thanks to Mari Hiruta, The Japan Foundation (Tokyo); Yoshihiro Nihei, The Japan Foundation (Los Angeles); Imamura Productions; and Brian Belovarac, Janus Films. Selected text adapted from program notes by the UCLA Film & Television Archive.

VENGEANCE IS MINE (FUKUSHU SURU WA WARE NI ARE)

SATURDAY DECEMBER 1 AT 7PM

Ken Ogata delivers a chilling performance as Iwao Enokizu, the anti-hero who graduates from fraud to murder in this gripping thriller. *Vengeance Is Mine* represents Imamura's return to feature filmmaking after a decade making documentaries, largely for television, an experience revealed by the film's sober authenticity. Imamura tells his story in jigsaw-puzzle fashion, opening with the killer's capture, turning the film from a straight crime story to a rich character study.

Directed by Shohei Imamura. With Ken Ogata, Rentaro Mikuni, Chocho Miyako
Japan 1979, 35mm, color, 128 min. Japanese with English subtitles

A MAN VANISHES (NINGEN JOHATSU)

SATURDAY DECEMBER 1 AT 9:30PM

Rarely have films mixed fiction and documentary with the impact achieved by *A Man Vanishes*, which began as a documentary about the rising number of missing persons in Japan. The film presents one such case, that of a young man who disappeared while on a business trip. Imamura hired an actor to play an investigator who interacts with the missing man's fiancée. The result is a fascinating mixture of fact and fiction that builds through a series of revelations to a dizzying finale.

Directed by Shohei Imamura. With Yoshie Hayakawa, Shigeru Tsuruguchi, Sayo Hayakawa
Japan 1967, 35mm, b/w, 130 min. Japanese with English subtitles

THE PROFOUND DESIRE OF THE GODS (KAMIGAMI NO FUKAKI YOKUBO)

SUNDAY DECEMBER 2 AT 3PM

Imamura as anthropologist comes to the fore in this epic tale of the primal past subsisting within the modern world. An engineer from Tokyo is sent to a tropical island where he encounters a strange family ostracized for its incestuous practices. Although life on the island seems primitive to the engineer, he also finds it strangely alluring. The film imagines a confrontation between technology and tradition in which technology only appears to win,



SHOHEI IMAMURA THE PROFOUND DESIRE OF THE GODS 1968

with the irrational always close at hand as a counterweight to progress.

Directed by Shohei Imamura. With Rentaro Mikuni, Choichiro Kwarazaki, Kazuo Kitamura
Japan 1968, 35mm, color, 170 min. Japanese with English subtitles

WHY NOT? (EIJANAIIKA)

SUNDAY DECEMBER 2 AT 7:30PM

Set in the 1860s, the chaotic final days of the Tokugawa shogunate, *Why Not?* follows an assortment of proletariats – a peasant farmer just back from the U.S., his prostitute wife, an Okinawan seeking revenge, an ex-samurai, and an underworld boss – all swept up in the riots that plunged Japan into the 20th century. The film's title refers to the carnivalesque frenzy of the underclass and their apathy towards the future, which would be exploited by the forces of modernization and Meiji imperial control.

Directed by Shohei Imamura. With Kaori Momoi, Shigeru Izumiya, Masao Kusakari
Japan 1981, 35mm, color, 151 min. Japanese with English subtitles

THE PORNOGRAPHERS (JINRUIGAKU NYUMON)

MONDAY DECEMBER 3 AT 7PM

In this wicked black comedy, harried pornographer Ogata lives with a widow vowed to chastity by the dead husband who she believes has been reincarnated as the voyeuristic carp in her aquarium. While Ogata lusts after the widow's daughter, the widow showers affection on her son. Imamura's camera peeps through windows and around screens as the film proliferates points of view, most famously that of the carp in its tank.

Directed by Shohei Imamura. With Shoichi Ozawa, Sumiko Sakamoto
Japan 1966, 35mm, b/w, 128 min. Japanese with English subtitles

KARAYUKI-SAN, THE MAKING OF A PROSTITUTE (KARAYUKI-SAN)

MONDAY DECEMBER 3 AT 9:30PM

Imamura travels to Malaysia to interview a *karayuki-san*, one of the many Japanese women forced into sexual slavery by the military government. Like many of the *karayuki-san*, Kikuyo Zendo, now toothless at 74 and the widow of an Indian shopkeeper, chose not to return to Japan after the war. Imamura probes Zendo's past and her horrifying wartime experience.

Directed by Shohei Imamura.
Japan 1970, 16mm, color, 70 min. Japanese with English subtitles

THE BALLAD OF NARAYAMA (NARAYAMA-BUSHI KO)

FRIDAY DECEMBER 7 AT 7PM

The inhabitants of an isolated mountain village practice population control by carrying their elders to the top of Mount Narayama to die when they reach 70. Though in robust health and a year shy of her fate, Orin can't wait for her turn at the peak, even knocking out her own teeth to convince her sons she's ready. Unlike Kinoshita's Kabuki-ized film version, Imamura's *Ballad of Narayama* is a bawdy, corporeal burlesque that wholeheartedly affirms feeding and copulation as the essence of life.

Directed by Shohei Imamura. With Sumiko Sakamoto, Ken Ogata, Aki Takejo
Japan 1983, 35mm, color, 130 min. Japanese with English subtitles



SHOHEI IMAMURA *THE PORNOGRAPHERS* 1966

ZEGEN

FRIDAY DECEMBER 7 AT 9:30PM

The title translates as "the pimp," designating the character who serves as our guide through Imamura's satiric vision of Japanese expansionism. Ken Ogata plays a Japanese hairdresser in Hong Kong at the turn of the twentieth century who ends up a spy in Manchuria for the Japanese government. Seeing the writing on the wall, he turns his entrepreneurial skills from espionage towards establishing a string of brothels in Southeast Asia, figuring that once the Japanese armies invade, he'll make a fortune.

Directed by Shohei Imamura. With Ken Ogata, Mitsuko Baisho, Chung-Hsiung Ko

Japan 1987, 35mm, color, 124 min. Japanese with English subtitles

PIGS AND BATTLESHIPS (*BUTA TO GUNKAN*)

SATURDAY DECEMBER 8 AT 7PM

This absurdist depiction of a postwar Japan supposedly imbibing democracy while prospering from the presence of the U.S. military is generally considered to be Imamura's first masterpiece. The pimping gangsters in Yokusaka port contrive a plan to raise pigs for the black market, feeding the swine with kitchen scraps from the U.S. Navy. Young Haruko tries to steer her teen hood boyfriend away the scheme but lands in trouble herself. In a film crowded with energy and camera movement, the climax is a standout: an anarchic shoot-out amidst a melee of stampeding pigs.

Directed by Shohei Imamura. With Hiroyuki Nagato, Jitsuko Yoshimura, Yoko Minamida

Japan 1961, 35mm, b/w, 108 min. Japanese with English subtitles

THE INSECT WOMAN (*NIPPON KONCHUKI*)

SATURDAY DECEMBER 8 AT 9:15PM

In a brilliant film that bears comparison to Fassbinder's *The Marriage of Maria Braun*, two generations of brash, no-nonsense Imamura women survive cataclysmic misfortunes and betrayals by relying on their "entomological" instincts for self-preservation at any cost. After the death of her lovers, the illegitimate Tome leaves her village to work in a brothel that she will eventually usurp

from its madam. In time, Tome's own illegitimate daughter will grow to repeat this cycle... Imamura uses the grotesque to explode the sentimental connection between femininity and family values and to mock masculine pretensions of strength and reliability.

Directed by Shohei Imamura. With Sachiko Hidari, Kazuo Kitamura, Jitsuko Yoshimura

Japan 1963, 35mm, b/w, 123 min. Japanese with English subtitles

LIGHTS OF NIGHT (*NISHI GINZA EKI-MAE*)

SUNDAY DECEMBER 9 AT 3PM

For his second film, Imamura was assigned by the studio Nikkatsu to direct this vehicle for singer-comedian Frank Nagai. The result is a comedy about a hen-pecked drug-store owner who spends his days reminiscing about a wartime romance in the tropics. Even in this studio exercise, Imamura uses the feminine and the pre-modern as markers of a soulfulness lacking in contemporary Japan.

Directed by Shohei Imamura. With Frank Nagai, Masahiko Shimazu, Hisano Yamaoka

Japan 1958, 35mm, b/w, 52 min. Japanese with English subtitles

FOLLOWED BY

MY SECOND BROTHER (*NIANCHAN*)

This studio assignment finds Imamura venturing into the kind of realism he would later use as a launching pad for his own obsessions. The film is based on a true story, adapted from the diary by a real little girl of Korean descent, one of four siblings in a working-class family. When their father dies, the children are left to fend for themselves. While not a typical Imamura film, *My Second Brother* looks forward to the filmmaker's future investment in the vitality of the impoverished social outcasts.

Directed by Shohei Imamura. With Hiroyuki Nagato, Kayo Matsuo, Takeshi Okimura

Japan 1959, 35mm, b/w, 101 min. Japanese with English subtitles

STOLEN DESIRE (*NUSUMARETA YOKUJO*)

SUNDAY DECEMBER 9 AT 7PM

Stolen Desire, Imamura's film debut, can be seen as a ribald, contrarian reworking of Ozu's *A Story of Floating Weeds*. An idealistic director quits school to join a traveling theater troupe and finds himself trapped in a love triangle between the leading player's wife and her younger sister. Imamura has claimed the disillusioned protagonist was modeled after himself.

Directed by Shohei Imamura. With Osamu Takizawa, Hiroyuki Nagato, Yoko Minamida

Japan 1958, 35mm, b/w, 92 min. Japanese with English subtitles

ENDLESS DESIRE (*HATESHI NAKI YOKUBO*)

SUNDAY DECEMBER 9 AT 9PM

On the tenth anniversary of Japan's WWII surrender, a motley group of five gathers in the basement of a butcher shop to dig up a cache of morphine buried during the war. Imamura initiates a grimly humorous tale of twisted relationships, prefiguring similar entanglements to come in his later films.

Directed by Shohei Imamura. With Hiroyuki Nagato, Sanea Nakahara, Ko Nishimura

Japan 1958, 35mm, b/w, 100 min. Japanese with English subtitles

BLACK RAIN (*KUROI AME*)

MONDAY DECEMBER 10 AT 7PM

Imamura tackles the atomic bombing of Hiroshima with a typically idiosyncratic approach, focusing neither on the explosion itself nor the ensuing holocaust but on the aftereffects years later. Rather than radiation poisoning, Imamura explores the emotional fallout of the bombing damage to the bodies and souls. The plot concerns an aging couple attempting to marry off their niece whose ex-potential suitors are scared off by rumors of radiation sickness. In adapting Masuji Ibuse's novel, Imamura finally enters the territory of Ozu (under whom he worked as an apprentice and whose directing and visual style he consciously rejected) only to reveal it as stricken by the Atomic Age.

Directed by Shohei Imamura. With Kazuo Kitamura, Etsuko Ichihara, Yoshiko Tanaka

Japan 1989, 35mm, b/w, 123 min. Japanese with English subtitles

THE EEL (*UNAGI*)

MONDAY DECEMBER 10 AT 9:15PM

An offbeat return to the terrain of *Vengeance Is Mine*, *The Eel* again features a murderer as protagonist, although here the killings are a crime of passion. The film primarily concerns the killer's attempt to isolate and protect himself from society and from emotion upon his parole. Koji Yakusho (*Eureka*, *Babel*) plays the main character, whose only confidant is the titular animal and who is offered redemption by a woman he rescues from a suicide attempt and by the eccentric inhabitants of a small town.

Directed by Shohei Imamura. With Koji Yakusho, Misa Shimizu, Fujio Tsuneta

Japan 1997, 35mm, color, 117 min. Japanese with English subtitles

INTENTIONS OF MURDER (*AKAI SATSUI*)

FRIDAY DECEMBER 14 AT 7PM

Intentions of Murder features the very archetype of the indomitable and indefatigable Imamura heroine. At the film's start, Sadako leads a bleak life as the unacknowledged wife of a tyrannical librarian. Only after she is raped by a burglar does she begin to realize the power of her sexuality. In a twist on the typical Japanese "pink film" plot, she runs away with the rapist, harboring the murderous intentions of the title.

Directed by Shohei Imamura. With Masumi Harukawa, Shigeru Tsuyuguchi, Ko Nishimura

Japan 1964, 35mm, b/w, 150 min. Japanese with English subtitles

A HISTORY OF POSTWAR JAPAN AS TOLD BY A BAR HOSTESS (*NIPPON SENGU-SHI: MADAMU OMBORO NO SEIKATSU*)

FRIDAY DECEMBER 14 AT 9:45PM

Rather than an "official story" of Japan's postwar economic miracle, Imamura offers the pointed views of the resilient, lower-caste Madame Omboro, brilliantly contrasting the bar owner's story of her life with news-reel footage of major events from 1945 to 1970: from Japan's surrender at the end of WWII through U.S. occupation to student protests and the Vietnam War.

Directed by Shohei Imamura.

Japan 1970, 16mm, b/w, 105 min. Japanese with English subtitles